



GLASGOW CITY HOUSING

Housing: The Council's Proposals for Glasgow

Approved by City of Glasgow District Council
1989

CITY OF GLASGOW DISTRICT COUNCIL

£2.00 net

Glasgow City Council is committed to housing policies aimed at:

- meeting peoples' housing needs;
- providing a high quality housing service;
- offering real choice for everyone;
- securing the provision of a wide range of good houses at affordable costs;
- offering to its own tenants genuine partnership and participation.

The Council has been following these policies consistently for the last decade often in partnership with other public agencies and, where appropriate, with the private sector.

Now the Council is faced with Scottish Homes and a Government determined to reduce the role of the City Council in the housing field. This 'White Paper' re-states the Council's policies and outlines its response to Scottish Homes.

The Council hopes that it will be widely read and discussed within the City and that the Council and the citizens of Glasgow can go forward together in the future as they have done in the past, to improve the City's housing.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Government's new Housing Act will affect millions of lives. In the wake of the Act and of the entry of many new bodies into the housing market, Glasgow City Council is taking the opportunity in its own 'White Paper' to make clear its position on these new laws and to set out its policies for the future of Housing in Glasgow. We want the Government to answer the challenge laid down by the Council. We want tenants and other customers of the City's Housing Service to be clear about the Council's ambitions for Housing in Glasgow and about the implications for them of the new laws.

2 Background

2.1 It is important to remember that local authorities became the major providers of housing because of the failure of the private sector to provide and maintain housing on a scale and to a standard sufficient to meet the housing needs of the community. Prior to the introduction of local authority housing for rent, all rented housing was controlled by private landlords. Many tenants lived in appalling conditions characterised by:

- poor standards of housing;
 - lack of adequate sanitation;
 - lack of repairs;
 - harassment and abuse of individual tenants;
 - lack of security with tenants living in fear;
 - corrupt allocation policies;
- all leading to the creation of slums and degradation.

2.2 The introduction of local authority housing under the control of Councils answerable to the community at the ballot box, put an end to most of these abuses and injustices.

2.3 Glasgow has a long history of providing social housing for rent for those who want it. The Council has continued this tradition but, in recognition of the changing needs and expectations of the community and the importance to the City's economy of having a wide range of good housing, has assumed wider responsibilities, and become involved in bringing about improvements in every sector of Glasgow's housing.

2.4 The recent legislation is designed to diminish the role of local authorities as providers of housing and to re-introduce 'housing for profit' which would once again place tenants at the mercy of private landlords whose prime objective is the generation of profit.

2.5 The Council has provided and managed a significant proportion of the City's housing for many years now and, notwithstanding the new legislation, will continue to be the major force in housing provision in Glasgow by virtue of its statutory powers and duties and its significant land and property holdings. The Council will continue to be the largest landlord in the City and believes that, given a genuine choice, most tenants will still want to live in City Council houses.

3 The Council's Housing Policies

3.1 Glasgow City Council is the sole elected authority with statutory responsibility for housing provision within the City. In undertaking this responsibility the Council recognises the diverse needs of the community — not least of the homeless, the young, the elderly and the disabled; people's changing aspirations; the need to improve choice, to give people a real say in their housing and to develop a wide range of ways of meeting different housing needs.

3.2 The Council aims to ensure that quality housing is available at a cost which people can afford to pay.

3.3 The Council will continue, despite inadequate funding, to improve as much as possible of its own housing to high standard and help to improve other parts of the housing stock — through improvement and repair grants.

3.4 The Council believes that tenants and residents must have effective control over their housing environment. Tenants themselves will decide whether they wish to exercise this control directly through the creation of Co-operatives, or indirectly through a Housing Department controlled by elected Councillors and influenced by active Tenants' Associations. Tenants have the right to be consulted on proposals which affect the ownership and management of their homes and to hold fair ballots on proposals for change.

3.5 Other agencies have a legitimate role in housing provision and over the years the Council has worked closely with Public Agencies like the SSHA and the Housing Corporation in Scotland and done much to foster the development of successful community based Housing Associations. Many new initiatives have also been taken in collaboration with private sector agencies to provide affordable housing for the growing number who wish to own their own homes. The Council will continue to co-operate with all agencies which have a clear track record in housing achievement, where there are clear benefits for the people of Glasgow.

3.6 The Council will continue to transfer houses to alternative 'not for profit' social landlords such as Co-operatives if such landlords agree:

possible level of provision, and

- (b) to assist the Council by playing their part in meeting its housing needs including special needs such as housing the homeless.

3.7 The Council will assist and provide advice and support for tenants seriously considering such 'not for profit' landlords. It will not allow tenants to be in any way forced into accepting a new landlord.

3.8 The Council will have no dealings with profit seeking, private landlords.

3.9 The Council already recognises the needs and aspirations of people who wish to own their own homes and will continue to encourage the provision of housing for sale.

The Council has no option but to comply with the 'Right to Buy' legislation but remains firmly opposed to the indiscriminate sale of Council houses under that legislation because:

- (a) it reduces the supply of the best of the public sector rented accommodation; and
- (b) it is economically and socially wrong to sell scarce public assets at heavily discounted prices.

4 The Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 — The Council's View

4.1 The previous paragraphs set out the Council's fundamental housing aims and policies. The Government's new laws could affect the City Council's ability to carry out its policies.

The new laws will:

- ▶ reduce tenants' rights;
- ▶ put market forces and profit before the needs of people;
- ▶ dramatically increase rents and nett housing costs (after benefit) of those least able to afford them;
- ▶ improve housing choice for a minority but limit choice severely for the great majority;
- ▶ put much of Scottish housing under the control of Scottish Homes — an unelected, centralised bureaucracy based in Edinburgh;
- ▶ prevent the City Council (which enjoys the support of a large majority of the electorate) from carrying out the policies and implementing the manifesto on which it was elected by the people of Glasgow;

Councils should be forced to sell their houses to that landlord for a fraction of their true value so that the landlord can make a good profit on his 'investment'.

The Council says it can be both 'enabler' and 'provider'. Indeed the Council has been doing both for years and doing it responsibly, sensitively and efficiently. If it's working — which it is — why introduce a new unelected public body like Scottish Homes? Is it because the Government's own 'creature' can be more easily forced to hand over its former SSHA stock (and anything else it may acquire in future) to private landlords?

4.6 Resources

The Government says that public money is not being spent effectively on housing: that Council houses are badly maintained. It wants to attract private money from City Institutions into providing housing for rent.

The Council says: The Government has drastically cut in real terms the amount of money (revenue and capital) spent on public housing since coming to office. In Glasgow alone the cut amounts to £500 million over the past 10 years. That's a public disgrace and it's the tenants who have been made to suffer from inadequate repairs, lack of investment and rent increases far in excess of the rate of inflation. **The Council** says that financial institutions will only be interested in profit, and not in meeting housing need.

The Council's Message: The Council will continue to fight for sufficient public funding and to use its ingenuity to secure private funding for housing on our terms to ensure that everyone living in Glasgow can have a quality house at a price they can afford.

4.7 Tenant/Resident Participation

The Government says it's serious about tenant involvement in housing; that it 'will give more opportunities for tenants to control their own destinies.'

The Council says: We've heard it all before. The Government talks — we act! Glasgow is the national leader in tenant involvement and in developing community led schemes of social ownership and Co-operatives. In developing these schemes, the Council has worked in partnership with tenants. What rights will the tenants of private landlords have to control their destinies? Who do you trust? The Council? The Government?

The Council's Message: What matters is not what you say about tenant involvement — but what you do. The Council does involve tenants in its deliberations and will continue to work in partnership with its tenants and with Tenants' Associations to promote policies which will benefit the whole community.

4.8 Rents

The Government says that rents are too low in public sector housing but has said very little about rents under the new 'assured tenancy' schemes. These will not be 'fair' rents but 'Market Rents', which will give Private Landlords a 'proper' return on their investment.

The Council says: The Government has forced the Council to increase rents by reducing public subsidy. Few public tenants in Glasgow would agree that rents are too low for the service which they receive.

The Council's Message: The Government wants rents to rise so that private investors can be attracted into the housing market, for profit.

5 The Council's housing challenge to the Government

5.1 The Council is committed to the pursuit of housing policies which best meet the needs of Glasgow and its people. At present, the Council and many people throughout Glasgow are deeply uneasy about the Government's intentions on housing. Many questions remain unanswered; many fears unresolved; many reports about the Government's real objectives as yet unconfirmed. The Council calls on the Government to come clean; to let the people of Glasgow know the facts and the Government's real intentions.

- ▶ Will Glasgow be permitted to deploy substantially more resources to deal with its severe housing problems?
- ▶ Under the new housing regime who will control private landlords and how?
- ▶ Scottish Homes has now agreed to allow its tenants to ballot about proposals for transferring their houses to alternative landlords. What happens to those (even a minority) who vote no? What about those who don't even vote?
- ▶ What are 'affordable' rents? How much will they be? What if tenants can't afford them?
- ▶ Will the Government ensure that those unable to pay the new higher rents are subsidised so that they too have real choice?
- ▶ Local Councils supposedly have a more positive 'strategic and enabling' housing role — will they be given the requisite powers and resources?
- ▶ Improved provision for special needs and for homeless people is urgently required but this has been totally ignored in previous Government announcements. What does the Government intend to do about it?
- ▶ If the legislation is indeed about choice, why won't the Government allow tenants to choose to transfer to local authority housing if they are dissatisfied with their new landlord? (Opinion polls show, for example, that tenants in New Towns overwhelmingly want to transfer to the local authority. Their wishes will apparently be ignored.)

5.2 The Council thinks the answers to these questions are vital and asks the Government to provide them.

6.1 It will be clear by now that the Council is seriously concerned about the new legislation and the potential damage it could cause. The Council has been elected to safeguard and promote the housing interests, needs and aspirations of its citizens. It will continue to do so unless prevented by the Government.

6.2 Objectives for the Future

The Council has seven main housing objectives.

FIRST the Council will continue to provide housing of a good standard at affordable rents. The Council recognises its duty to provide or to secure the provision of housing for all sections of the community. In particular, the Council will continue to pursue policies which recognise the specific needs of those at risk such as the homeless, the young and the elderly.

SECOND the Council will ensure that tenants have an adequate opportunity through meaningful prior consultation to influence decisions affecting them and will encourage tenants to participate fully, if they wish to do so, in the management of their homes.

THIRD the Council will continue to improve the level and quality of the Council housing stock and its service to its tenants.

FOURTH the Council will continue to encourage new forms of tenure and to support co-operatives and other 'not for profit' social landlords who are willing to operate in accordance with the policies set out in this paper.

FIFTH the Council will continue to work with other agencies to secure an adequate supply of houses for owner occupation to meet the demands of the community.

SIXTH the Council will continue to pursue alternative funding sources to secure adequate investment in the City's housing stock. The findings of the independent Grieve Inquiry confirmed the Council's own view that restrictions imposed by the Government on capital investment in Glasgow's housing have led to serious deterioration of the housing fabric — public and private. One of the key objectives of the Council is to reverse this trend by ensuring increased investment in both sectors.

SEVENTH the Council will continue to use its own resources and those of other agencies to create and maintain a pleasant environment for its houses, in which people can take pride and feel safe and secure. Landscaping will be substantially improved particularly in the peripheral estates. Policies will be devised in collaboration with the Police and other public agencies to tackle crime and vandalism.

How will the Council do this — a programme of action

6.3 The Council will:

- ▶ continue to improve its own Housing Service;
- ▶ effectively market and promote the Housing Service;
- ▶ review its investment strategy to make sure that money is spent wisely and that the investment is protected. The Council will improve and repair as many homes as possible by all available means, including co-operation with other housing agencies whose aims are consistent with the Council's objectives. This will mean persuading Scottish Homes to use its resources to get what we want done;
- ▶ develop a Code of Practice to safeguard tenants' rights and interests — including the right to ballot;

- ▶ develop and evaluate objectively, in conjunction with tenants, a range of options for the future transfer of Council houses into Co-operative or other 'not for profit' social ownership or management;
- ▶ become the 'Watchdog' of private landlords;
- ▶ produce a range of detailed advice leaflets and develop housing advisory services.

7 Real progress or just words — earning the right

7.1 The Council recognises that it has to 'Earn the Right' to remain a major landlord and is committed to further improvements in its service. Over the past few years, notwithstanding massive reductions in housing resources, the Council has achieved notable progress on a wide range of key housing issues.

- ▶ Repairs
 - Local Repair Teams have begun to give a better, more local service.
 - Repairs service administration is being made more efficient; so that more repairs are being done for the same money.
- ▶ Housing Benefit
 - The Council has continued to provide a sensitive, helpful, efficient benefit administration service to all tenants in the City — despite Government changes in Housing Benefit which have caused hardship to many tenants.
- ▶ Lettings
 - Many local letting initiatives have been introduced giving tenants more power.
- ▶ Tenants' Rights
 - The Council has led the way in negotiating with Glasgow Council of Tenants' Associations a more relevant and effective lease, which sets out clearly the responsibilities of both Council and tenant.
- ▶ Estate Management
 - Major efforts have been made to improve the environment; to deal with problem areas and to enforce conditions of tenancy.
 - Better security and a Concierge service have been introduced into many multi-storey blocks — addressing one of the big problems of this form of housing. These measures are being extended to other areas as resources become available.
- ▶ Investment
 - The Council obtained by special covenant the loan of an additional £140 million to spend on major improvements to Council housing. Much of this is being

high quality houses in an attractive environment. Detailed planning, in partnership with tenants, has focussed not only on how the money should be spent but on arrangements for future management and maintenance.

- ▶ Choice
 - The Council will continue to promote **more choice for tenants**.
 - We have introduced furnished flats and will expand this choice option for more tenants.
 - We will continue to provide housing for students, single people and people with special needs.
- ▶ The Elderly
 - The Council is introducing an alarm system for tenants starting this year and will continue to encourage the provision of sheltered housing for rent, both by the Council and Housing Associations.
- ▶ Tenant Involvement
 - The Council continues to support the Glasgow Council of Tenants' Associations.
 - The Council will, on behalf of the tenants' movement, collect the Tenants' Action Fund, which will help tenants to organise and obtain greater power and influence.
 - We will continue to extend tenant power, with local letting initiatives and management agreements and by giving tenants a major say in the content of investment programmes.
- ▶ Service
 - We will continue to improve our standards of service by providing more and better offices and access to our customers.

8 Conclusion

8.1 These are only a few examples of what the Council has done or is doing to improve our housing service in the City. But we can and will do better to 'Earn the Right' to be landlord to a substantial proportion of citizens and to safeguard the housing interests of all the people of Glasgow.

8.2 It is essential that the Council and the citizens of Glasgow, whom it is elected to serve, work together in partnership.

In this document the Council has set out its housing principles, objectives and proposals.

We believe that they reflect broadly what the vast majority of the citizens want. Together, we can make sure that the housing needs of the City are really addressed and finally met. The Government and Scottish Homes can, of course, help us. We hope they will. But we will get on with it anyway, taking the lead on Glasgow's behalf as we have always done.

TOGETHER WE CAN GET IT RIGHT!

If you need any further information or help with any housing problem or are approached by any landlord and need advice, please contact your local Councillor or local Housing Office.

If you have any views on this White Paper which you would like the Council to consider, please send them in writing to the Director of Housing, Lomond House, 9 George Square, Glasgow G2 1TG, by 15 September 1989.

The Council will take into account any such views as part of the ongoing review of its Housing service now being carried out in pursuance of the recommendations to the Grieve Inquiry.